Research Assistant Training

Tips & Tricks for Finding (Reliable) Web Content

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What we will cover

- Finding Statistics
- Advanced Google Searching
- Wayback Machine
- URL Parsing
Finding Statistics
What we will cover

- Government Sources
- Other Sources
- Things to Remember
First, look for news or journal articles for references to specific studies or data.

Government Agencies tend to have a lot of statistical information.

The hard part can be figuring out which agency you’re looking for.

Try usa.gov/statistics.
Federal Government Data and Statistics

These federal agency programs collect, analyze, and disseminate statistical data and information:

- **Bureau of Economic Analysis** collects information on economic indicators, national and international trade, accounts, and industry.

- **Bureau of Justice Statistics** reports on justice systems, crime, criminal offenders, and victims of crime.

- **Bureau of Labor Statistics** measures labor market activity, working conditions, and price changes in the U.S. economy.

- **Bureau of Transportation Statistics** provides data on airline on-time performance, pirates at sea, transportation safety and availability, motorcycle trends, and more.

- **Census Bureau** is the main source of data about our nation’s people and economy.

- **DAP Public Dashboard** provides a window into how people are interacting with the government online.

- **Data.gov** is the home of the U.S. Government's open data. Find federal, state, and local data, tools, and resources to conduct research, build apps, design data visualizations, and more.

- **Economic Research Service** informs public and private decision making on economic and policy issues related to agriculture, food, the environment, and rural development.

- **Energy Information Administration** provides data on U.S. use of coal, natural gas, nuclear energy, renewable energy, and more.

- **National Agricultural Statistical Service** researches data on food production and supply, organic sales, chemical use, demographics of U.S. producers, and more. Every five years it conducts the **Census of Agriculture** that provides agricultural data for every county in the United States.

- **National Center for Education Statistics** researches education in the United States. It publishes the **Digest of Education Statistics**, which includes international comparisons of students, and the annual report to Congress, **The Condition of Education**, which reports the progress of American education.
Other Sources

- Pew Research Center (www.pewresearch.org)
  - Nonpartisan “fact tank” that does public opinion polling, demographic research, etc.
- Professional organizations
Things to Remember
Things to Remember

- Look for reports, not raw data
  - It can be useful to have access to the data, but you don’t want to be in a position of having to do data analysis

- Be aware of bias
  - Read the reports critically. Does the conclusion actually follow from the data?
  - Keep track of your sources and do research to find out what kind of slant they might have
Internet Research
Topics

- Advance Google Searching
- Internet Archive
- URL Parsing
Advanced Google Search
Advanced Google Search

- Google has advanced search functions
- Easiest way to find it is by searching for "advanced search"
- Or go to google.com/advanced_search
Advanced Search

Find pages with...

all these words: |

this exact word or phrase: |

any of these words: |

none of these words: |

numbers ranging from: to |

To do this in the search box

Type the important words: tricolor rat terrier
Put exact words in quotes: "rat terrier"
Type OR between all the words you want: miniature OR standard
Put a minus sign just before words you don't want: -rodent, -"Jack Russell"
Put 2 periods between the numbers and add a unit of measure: 10..35 lb, $300..$500, 2010..2011

Then narrow your results by...

language: any language
Find pages in the language you select.

region: any region
Find pages published in a particular region.

last update: anytime
Find pages updated within the time you specify.

site or domain: |
Search one site (like wikipedia.org) or limit your results to a domain like .edu, .org or .gov

terms appearing: anywhere in the page
Search for terms in the whole page, page title, or web address, or links to the page you're looking for.

SafeSearch: Show most relevant results
Tell SafeSearch whether to filter sexually explicit content.

file type: any format
Find pages in the format you prefer.

usage rights: not filtered by license
Find pages you are free to use yourself.

Advanced Search
Advanced Google Search

- You can also use the operators in the search bar
  - site: Search within one domain or top level domain (i.e., edu, gov)
  - inurl: URL must contain the search term
  - filetype: Find only a particular format (i.e., pdf)
  - AROUND(X): Proximity search

- And so many more!
  (For a longer list, see https://moz.com/learn/seo/search-operators)
Internet Archive’s Wayback Machine
Wayback Machine

The Wayback Machine is a service that allows people to visit archived versions of web sites.

Why?

- Trying to find information from a site that no longer exists
- Looking for a report that has been removed from a government website
- Curious to see what USD’s webpage used to look like

https://archive.org/web/
URL Parsing
Uniform Resource Locators (URLs) or web addresses, is the location of the website or document.

Understanding the way a website is organized can help you bypass a site’s navigation or find orphaned pages and information.
Imagine that you’re looking for an article by professor Floyd Neiderman from volume 20, issue 2 of *Law and Technology*.

You’ve done some searching but the closest you’ve come is an article from volume 23, issue 3 at this address:


By editing the URL, we can try and find our way to the article we want.
How?

- Generally, going back through the URL will lead to index pages. So this would show us an index page for all issues and articles within Volume 23:


- What if that fails?

- We can infer the organizational structure from the URL and try manipulating it to find the document we need:

And always remember…

- The Reference Librarians are always here to help!